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APOLOGIES TO ASHBY WHO WE FAILED TO ACKNOWLEDGE FOR HIS COLOR GUIDE ON MARC SILVESTRI'S PINUP IN ISSUE 1

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ONCE, THIS PLACE WAS PARADISE.
THE ANCIENT FAERIE-KINGS LIVED HERE, AND RULED WISELY. NO CREATURE CAME TO HARM, OR FELT MALICE TOWARDS ANOTHER.
UNICORNS WALKED IN SILVER MEADOWS, WHILE GOLDEN SONGBIRDS DANCED ON THE SUNBEAMS. THE LITTLE FOLK WERE SAFE TO BUILD THEIR HOMES BENEATH THE ENDLESS RAINBOWS, AND ELVEN BOYS DID STROLL THE FORESTS, ARM IN ARM.
ALL WAS PEACE. ALL WAS BEAUTY.
ALL WAS WONDER.
WELL, I TELL YOU WHAT, MATE!

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HMM--
BEJAYSIS AN' BEGORRAH--!
A
LEPRECHAUN!

OLDEST AND WISEST OF THE FAERIE FOLK. GOD, THAT THOSE BLITCHERS OF DARKNESS WOULD MURDER EVEN HIM...
LITTLE FELLOW--TELL US WHERE YOUR KILLERS WENT, THAT WE MAY AVENGE YOU!

I HATE LEPRECHAUNS.
EH?

THEY GIVE THE IRISH A BAD NAME, WITH ALL THAT OLD CRAP ABOUT FAIRY-RINGS AND THE MYSTIC LAND OF ERIN AND THAT BLOODY RIDICULOUS ACCENT...
HUNDREDS OF YEARS FROM NOW, I BET PEOPLE'LL STILL BE EXPECTING US MICKS TO PONCE AROUND EATING SPUDS AND WAIVING FOUR-LEAFED CLOVERS, AND SAYING "TOP O' THE MORNIN' TO YE", TWO WORDS, KATARINA:
NOT ME.

...AN' THAT'S ALL OI KNOW, SOR, OI SWEAR TO YE. I... I FEAR MOI LOIFE IS ALL BUT DONE...
MAY--MAY THE BLESSIN' OF OIRLAND BE UPON YE FOR YER KOINDNESS, AND MAY THE ROAD ROISE TO MEET YE, AND--

SQUITCH
GAKK!
WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO THAT FOR?
I WAS PUTTING HIM OUT OF HIS MISERY! I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I JUST COULDN'T STAND SEEING THE POOR WEE FELLA SUFFER LIKE THAT!
KNOCK IT OFF, YOU TWO.
DID HE TELL YOU WHERE THIS ARMY OF DARKNESS HAD GONE? AND WHOSE ARMY THEY ARE, EXACTLY?
THE LAST HE DID NOT KNOW. BUT HE TOLD ME THEY HAVE GONE TO FAIR BEL-GADRYEL, THE CENTRE AND CAPITOL OF FAERIE.
I MUST HASTEN THERE AT ONCE. IF THE DARKNESS SHOULD BRING DOWN THE ELVEN KINGS, THEN ALL THIS LAND IS LOST.
THE CAPITOL! THAT'S WHERE THE LOOT'S GONNA BE!
SO WHERE IS THIS BEL-GADRYEL? WHAT DIRECTION?
IT'S... DAMN.
THE LITTLE FELLOW NEVER TOLD ME.
WHOA!

SOMETHING TELLS ME IT'S THAT WAY...
ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN CONTROL THIS DEVICE, KATARINA?
...I'M NOT SURE.
IT DID WHAT I WANTED IN THE FIGHT, BUT NOW IT SEEMS LIKE IT'S GOT A MIND OF IT'S OWN. I THINK IT WANTS SOMETHING...
IN BEL-GADRYEL.
THEN LET US GO.
DOESN'T IT WORRY YOU, HAVING THAT WHACKING GREAT LUMP OF IRONMONGERY STUCK ON YOUR HAND?
NOT REALLY. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO FINDING OUT EXACTLY WHAT IT IS...
I'VE GOT A FEELING WE COULD BE PRETTY GOOD TOGETHER.
I WAS THINKING THAT MYSELF.
HOW D'YOU MEAN?
YOU AND ME.
TELL ME YOU'RE KIDDING!
STALKER, IF YOU WERE THE LAST MAN ON EARTH YOUR CHANCES WOULD STILL BE LOWER THAN MOLE-DUNG! I MIGHT BE DOWN ON MY LUCK RIGHT NOW--AND BY THE WAY, YOU'D BETTER BE RIGHT ABOUT THIS FAERIE TREASURE--BUT I'D LIKE TO THINK I CAN STILL DO BETTER THAN YOU!
NOW LET'S GET GOING.
SO IS THAT A YES OR A NO?

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BEL-GADRYEL
OH, MY BLOODY DOGS OF WAR! SLAUGHTER THE BIG-EARED SCUM!
ONE MORE EFFORT--AND THE ELVEN CAPITOL IS OURS!
LET KILL THE BASTARDS BE YOUR WAR-CRY!!
I WANT A WORD WITH YOU, ROYALE.
MY LADY ELINOR... SHOULDN'T YOU BE BY YOUR MASTER'S SIDE? AIDING HIM IN THE PERILOUS FRAY?
KILL THE BASTARDS!
KILL THE BASTARDS!
KILL THE BASTARDS!
AHAHAHAHAHA!
I THINK LORD CARDINALE IS DOING FINE BY HIMSELF.
THIS IS QUITE A WAR YOU'VE GOTTEN US INTO. CARDINALE HAS COMMITTED ALL HIS DARKNESS POWER TO THE ASSAULT ON FAERIE. IF WE FAIL NOW, HIS EMPIRE BACK ON EARTH WILL FALL APART.
WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT OUT OF THIS, ROYALE?
I TOLD YOU. I WISH TO STUDY THE ELVISH MAGIC---
AND I TOLD YOU: I DON'T BELIEVE YOU.

ISN'T THIS IRRELEVANT? YOUR LORD HAS ALMOST WON HIS BATTLE. ONCE BEL-GADRYEL IS LINKED TO HIS EARTHLY CITADEL, THE FAERIE MAGIC WILL BE BOUND BY DARKNESS.
AND CARDINALE WILL HAVE THE WORLD...
THAT'S THE BIG PLAN, IS IT?
I DON'T TRUST YOU FOR AN INSTANT, YOU MORTAL WORM. CARDINALE WAS BETTER OFF WITHOUT YOU POURING POISON IN HIS EAR--
AND THAT'S WHAT'S REALLY GETTING TO YOU, ISN'T IT? THAT SOMEONE OTHER THAN ELINOR SHOULD ADVISE HER CARDINALE?
DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH ME, ROYALE.
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN I MYSELF AM OF THE DARKNESS?
GOOD CHRIST--!

AAKK--!
NOW, ROYALE...
QUESTIONS.
WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT, MORTAL? WHAT LIES WITHIN BEL-GADRYEL THAT INTERESTS YOU SO MUCH?
AND THE MORTAL WOMAN WE SAW--THIS WITCHBLADE THAT SHE WIELDS. WHAT IS IT, AND WHY DO YOU FEAR IT? WHAT THREAT DOES IT POSE TO US?
I--CAN'T-- BREATHE--!
ANSWER ME!
THE--THE WITCHBLADE IS-- THE ENEMY OF DARKNESS!
BOTH ARE OLDER THAN MAN, AND WERE CREATED TO DESTROY EACH OTHER. THE ANCIENTS WHO MADE THEM GAVE THEM AWESOME POWER--
SHOULD CARDINALE AND HIS DARKNESS MEET THE WIELDER OF THE WITCHBLADE, I CANNOT SAY FOR CERTAIN WHO WILL WIN--
PLEEEAASSE--!
AND YOU DIDN'T THINK TO MENTION THIS LITTLE DETAIL TO CARDINALE?
I--DIDN'T WISH TO-- DISTRACT HIM-- UUUUHH...!
DIDN'T WISH TO PUT HIM OFF ATTACKING FAERIE, YOU MEAN. AND NOW WE'RE HERE, AND THAT BLOODY WOMAN'S COMING FOR US.
WHY, ROYALE? WHY HAVE YOU BROUGHT US HERE?

GET DOWN HERE, WOMAN! THE FIRST SIEGE-WALL WILL NOT BE LEVELLED WITHOUT MAGIC!
I NEED YOUR POWER!
YES, MY LORD
AAAHH!
DON'T THINK YOU'VE GOTTEN AWAY WITH ANYTHING, ROYALE. THOSE ELVEN SCUM WILL BE DEAD IN NO TIME--
AND THEN YOU AND I WILL CONTINUE THIS DISCUSSION
YES--
YES WE WILL
YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS, YOU WHORE

I WAS WONDERING, LADY KATARINA, IF YOU WOULD BE SO GOOD AS TO TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF..
KATARINA WILL DO
I'M NO LADY.
ANYWAY, THERE'S NOT MUCH TO TELL. USED TO BE IN THE ARMY. THEN I WENT FREELANCE. MY DAD WANTED ME TO BE A NUN, BUT SOD THAT.
I LIKE...WELL, I LIKE DRINK NG AND FIGHTING, REALLY YEAH. N CE PINT AND A GOOD RUCK, PREFERABLY IN THAT ORDER.
AND...HAVE YOU TRAVELLED?
SURE, I'VE BEEN ALL OVER THE PLACE MUST HAVE GONE FROM THE NORTH OF NORWAY TO HALFWAY DOWN AFRICA...
ITALY, PERHAPS? SARDINIA?
I THINK SO, YEAH. WENT THROUGH SARDINIA ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO.
NEARER SEVEN.
YEAH.
WAIT A MINUTE, HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?
ER--
WHAT IS IT WITH YOU, EXACTLY? YOU KNEW MY NAME WHEN WE FIRST MET-- AND NOW YOU KNOW MY MOVEMENTS [redacted] AGO?!
OH MY GOD! LOOK!

KILL THE STRANGERS!
CREATURES OF DARKNESS!
RUN!
BUGGER THIS FOR A GAME OF SOLDIERS!
STALKER--!
OH YES.
LEAVE HIM, KATARINA! DEFEND YOURSELF!

AAAHEEEEE!!!
RUN, LITTLE MORSEL! GONNA HAVE YOUR GUTS FOR SUPPER!
OH GOD, NO! NOT ME! PLEASE!
LOVE IT WHEN YOU BEG MORSEL!

WAAAAAAGGGHH!!
SHOK!
SHOK!
SHOK!
SHOK!
SHOK!
KRRUMMPP!
WATCH YOUR BACK!
AAAHHH!
EEEEEIIOHH
UNNGH!

ART BY

Tom Boeisenfeld

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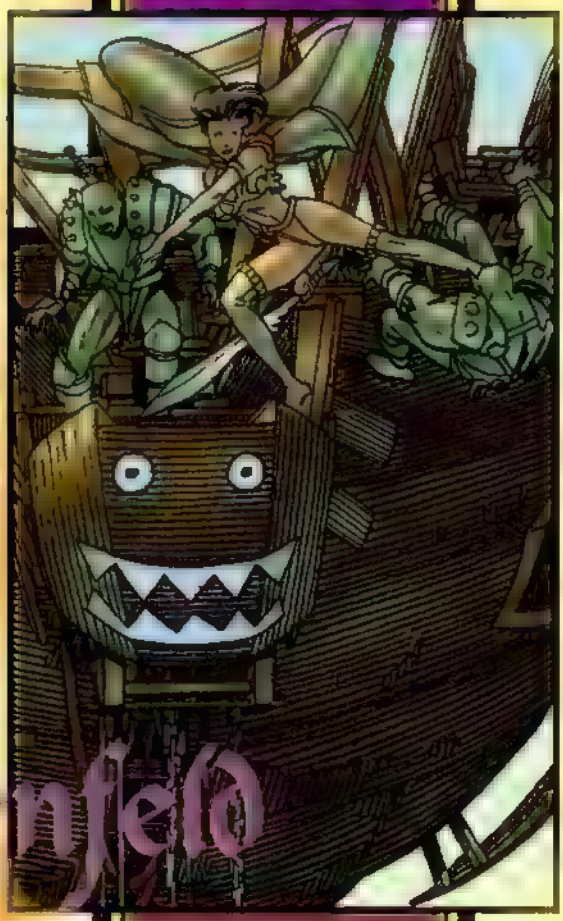
Ashby Manson

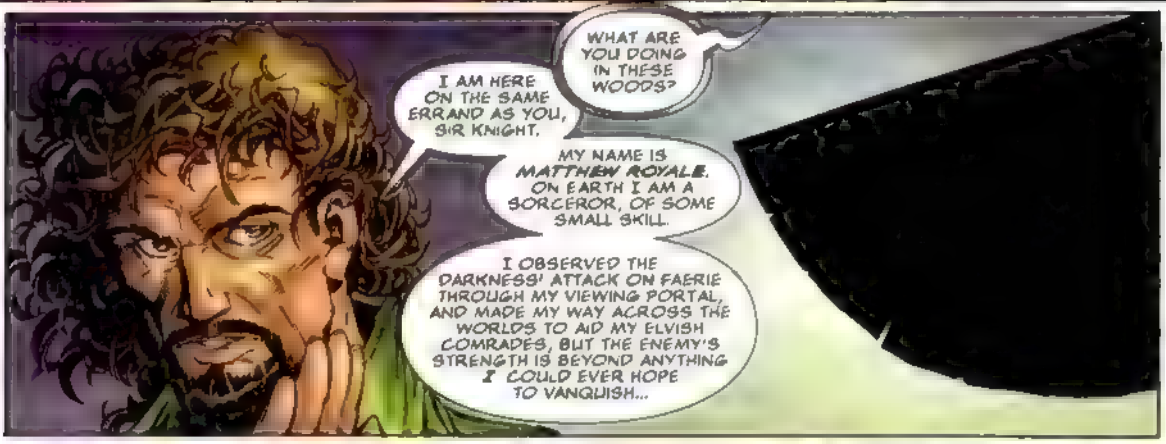


EVIL FILTH!
YAAAGH!!
DIE!!

UHHH
ARE YOU OKAY?
KEEP YOUR DISTANCE!
SUIT YOURSELF
WHAT'S HIS PROBLEM?
SEARCH ME MOODY SOD.
HERE, D'YOU SEE ME SHOOT THAT TOSSER DOWN? PRETTY GOOD, EH?
YEAH, I PARTICULARLY LIKED THE BIT WHERE YOU CRAPPED YOUR PANTS AND RAN LIKE BLOODY HELL, STALKER...
I AM READY.
WE CAN GO ON.

FIRST WALL HAS FALLEN.
THE SECOND WILL FOLLOW ANY MOMENT NOW CARDINALE STANDS ON THE BRINK OF TRIUMPH.
I MUST MOVE QUICKLY.
"αωδοκαιφμω"
...NO THANK YOU. I DO NOT REQUIRE FOOD
ALL THE MORE FOR US.
NOR DO I NEED TO REST, KATARINA.
YOU DON'T EAT?
I SHALL STAND WATCH FOR THE NIGHT.

WELL MET, FELLOW TRAVELLERS.
WHO GOES THERE?!
A FRIEND.


WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THESE WOODS?
I AM HERE ON THE SAME ERRAND AS YOU, SIR KNIGHT.
MY NAME IS MATTHEW ROYALE. ON EARTH I AM A SORCEROR, OF SOME SMALL SKILL.
I OBSERVED THE DARKNESS' ATTACK ON FAERIE THROUGH MY VIEWING PORTAL, AND MADE MY WAY ACROSS THE WORLDS TO AID MY ELVISH COMRADES, BUT THE ENEMY'S STRENGTH IS BEYOND ANYTHING I COULD EVER HOPE TO VANQUISH...

YOU, HOWEVER, KATARINA
YOU HOLD THE POWER TO DESTROY THEM ALL.
ME?

YOU STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT YOU BEAR...
HOLD ON, HOW D'YOU KNOW MY NAME?
I HAVE BEEN WATCHING YOUR PROGRESS TOO, MY DEAR. THIS WAS MY FIRST CHANCE TO MAKE CONTACT WITH YOU
LISTEN!

THE DARKNESS' EVIL WARLORD IS CARDINALE, AIDED BY HIS WITCH-QUEEN ELINOR. ONCE THEIR ASSAULT ON FAERIE IS COMPLETE, NOWHERE ON EARTH WILL BE SAFE FROM THEIR DEPRADATIONS
I CAN USE MY MAGIC TO TRANSPORT US TO THE CASTLE..
THOUGH THAT IS THE LIMIT OF MY POWER. IT WILL BE UP TO YOU THREE WARRIORS TO BATTLE THE ENEMY LEGIONS--
AH, TWO WARRIORS AND A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR, MATE..
BUT ONLY YOU CAN FACE CARDINALE, KATARINA. AND MATCH HIS DARKNESS WITH THE WITCHBLADE.
WITCHBLADE...?
THAT IS ITS NAME

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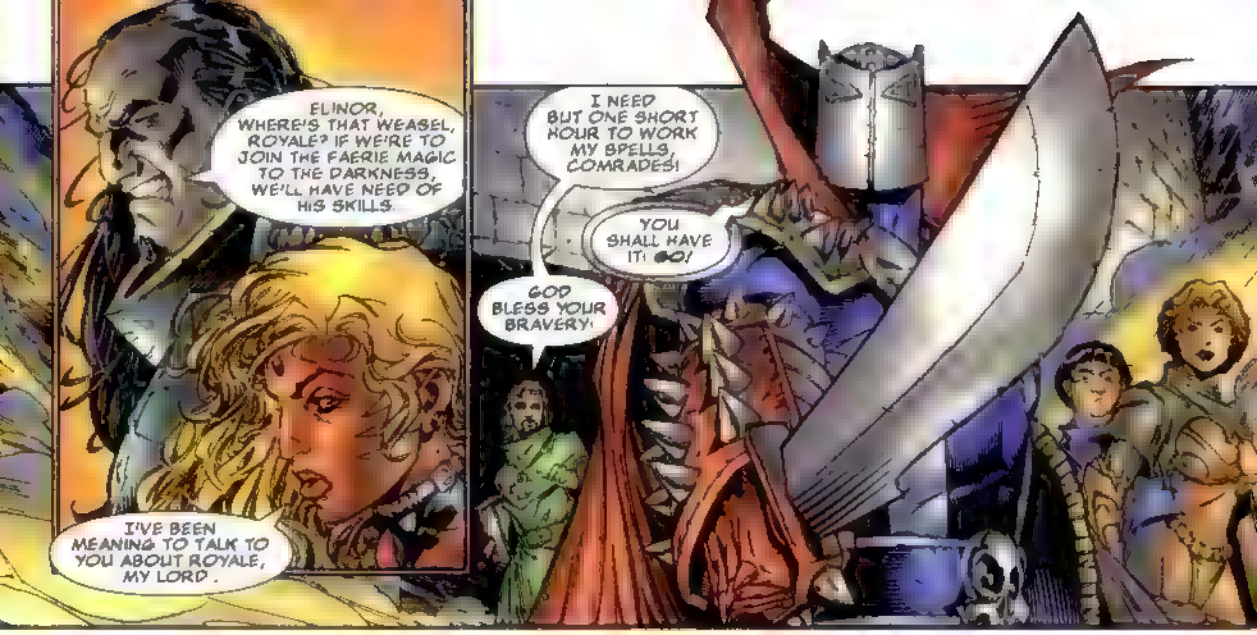
SUITS ME.../
BUT WE MUST GO AT ONCE. BEL-GADRYEL IS ALL BUT FINISHED—
ONE MOMENT SIR
WE MUST DISCUSS THIS
WELL?
THAT WEE WANKER COULD LOOK SHIFTY IN AN EMPTY BLOODY ROOM. I DON'T TRUST HIM AN INCH.
I DUNNO. IT SOUNDS LIKE HE CAN GET US TO THE CASTLE PRETTY QUICK...
THEN IT'S SETTLED.
YOU'LL REGRET IT...
YOU WANT TO WALK THE WHOLE WAY THERE, DO YOU?

WE'RE WITH YOU,
THEN HURRY! I PRAY WE YET HAVE TIME TO SAVE THE FAERIE FOLK!

LISTEN, WHEN WE GET OUR HANDS ON THIS TREASURE, I'M GONNA BE RICH BEYOND YOUR WILDEST
COULD BE QUITE A CATCH FOR THE RIGHT YOUNG LADY...
I'LL BE RICH TOO, YOU MORON!

OH YEAH
FORGOT ABOUT THAT.

PICK THE BONES OUT OF THAT, ELF-BOY!
THAT'S THE LAST OF THEIR WARRIORS
ALL OF YOU, SPREAD OUT! FIND WHERE THEIR MAGIC ARTIFACTS ARE HIDDEN!
WE'RE THERE!
IN GOD'S NAME! WHAT A SLAUGHTER!
THOSE SCUM--!
NOT YET! KEEP BACK, LEST WE SHOW OUR HAND TOO SOON!
WE MUST KEEP THE ELVISH MAGIC SAFE FROM CARDINALE AT ALL COSTS.
THERE, WITHIN THE TOWER OF COR'MYRETH, LIES THE TREASURE THAT OUR ENEMY COVETS. THE ELVES PROTECTED IT WITH POWERFUL SPELLS, OR MY PORTAL COULD HAVE BROUGHT US TO IT'S TOPMOST DOME...
IF YOU CAN DEFEND THE TOWER FOR LONG ENOUGH, I CAN ENTER ON FOOT AND LOCATE THE SOURCE OF THE ELVES' POWER--AND NEUTRALIZE IT, SO THAT CARDINALE CAN NEVER TAKE IT FOR HIS OWN.
SOUNDS GOOD TO ME.
AYE! LEAD ON!

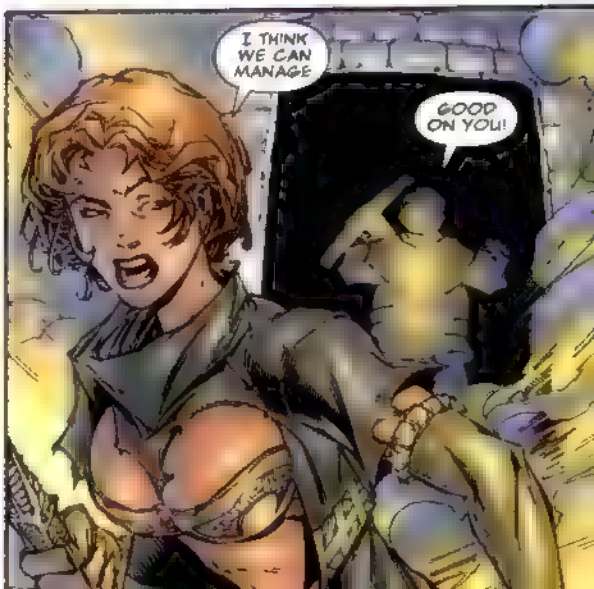

ELINOR, WHERE'S THAT WEASEL, ROYALE? IF WE'RE TO JOIN THE FAERIE MAGIC TO THE DARKNESS, WE'LL HAVE NEED OF HIS SKILLS.
I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT ROYALE, MY LORD.
I NEED BUT ONE SHORT HOUR TO WORK MY SPELLS, COMRADES!
YOU SHALL HAVE IT! GO!
GOD BLESS YOUR BRAVERY!

YOU IDIOTS.

THERE!
ALERT LORD CARDINALE!

HERE THEY COME...
LOOKING FORWARD TO TRYING THE WITCHBLADE AGAINST THIS DARKNESS...
HEY, I'VE HAD AN IDEA!

I STILL DON'T TRUST THIS ROYALE FELLA-- SO I THINK I'M GONNA FOLLOW HIM, KEEP AN EYE ON THE SNEAKY SOD
YOU'LL, AH... YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT HERE WITHOUT ME, WON'T YOU?


I THINK WE CAN MANAGE
GOOD ON YOU!

WHO THE HELL ARE THESE TWO?

CAUTION, MY LORD...THE WITCHBLADE COULD STILL--
YOU PAIR OF INSECTS CAN KISS IT GOODBYE! NO ONE DEFIES THE WILL OF CARDINA--
YOU KNOW WHAT?!

IF I HAD A FACE LIKE YOURS, I THINK I'D TEACH MY ARSE TO SPEAK!

KILL THEM!!

I COUNT AT LEAST A THOUSAND--
GOOD!
RIGHT, YOU BASTARDS!

COME AND GET IT!!!
TO BE CONTINUED, OH YES!

PENCILS BY

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Q-Tron

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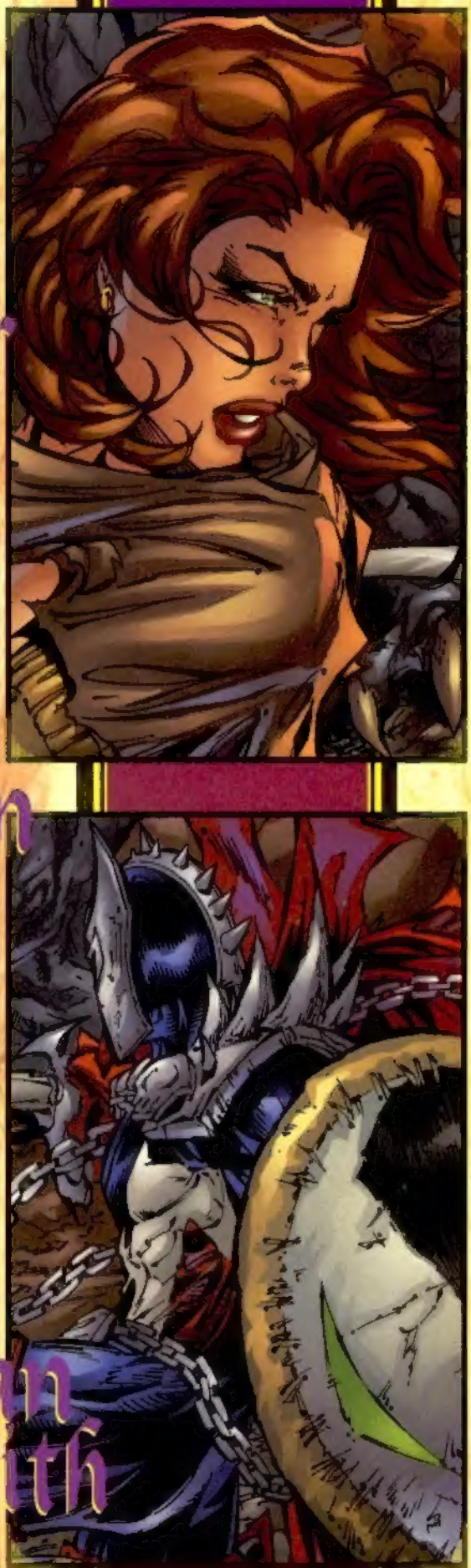

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